

The Cornfield Caper

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Joe Farmer walked aimlessly through the freshly cut corn maze, his boots sinking deep into the muddy earth. Joe, however, didn't notice his sinking situation, or the trail of deep footprints he left behind him. His attention was focused on the small open box in his right hand, and the diamond engagement ring inside it. "I am the luckiest man in the world," he said to himself, "... of all the guys here, she picked me." She being the one woman in the area that every guy in his town (including his brothers) wished to be picked by, the beautiful Ms. Maria Irene.

"Maria, will you marry me? ... Will you marry me, Maria? ... Maria, I love you. Marry me?"

Joe spoke each of the questions aloud, trying to determine which one he thought sounded best. Where would he ask? Would he get down on one knee? A cracking sound nearby, however, interrupted his train of thought. He stopped and looked around in all directions for the source of the sound, but the corn was too thick to see anything other than the short path he was on.

"Hello?" Joe called out. "Is someone there?"

Joe wasn't sure why, but being in the corn maze always made him feel uneasy, even though it was on his family's farm. Even though he and his brothers had spent their childhood chasing one another through the fields.

Another sound. This one was closer. Joe was just about to turn around and head back for the farmhouse, when he felt a sudden burst of pain erupt in his head. He blacked out before he could turn around to identify his attacker.

"Joe! Are you out here? Joe?" Joe could hear his little brother, Billy, calling out to him from somewhere off in the corn maze. Slowly he opened his eyes to see that he was face up in the muddy path.

"I'm over here," he shouted as he lifted himself to his feet. He had just started to brush the dirt off his pants, when he noticed the ring box he had been holding was gone. He instantly began to search

the area for it, but could see nothing other than his footprints and the footprints of the person who must have attacked him. He bent down to study the offender's tracks. They appeared slightly less deep and closer together than his prints, but the impressions were too smeared for Joe to be able to determine the tread or size of the shoe.

"Joe, there you are."

Joe looked up to see Billy coming towards him. "I've been looking all over for you. Austin has lunch ready. Everybody else is already inside," Billy said.

Joe had started to form a reply, but Billy had already turned around and disappeared back toward the house. Joe spent a few more minutes alone looking for the ring, but he knew it was gone. Taken by the person who had hit him.

When Joe entered the kitchen, his brothers were all seated at their places around the table. Nick, the oldest and biggest of the bunch by four inches and nearly fifty pounds, sat at the head of the table. Beside him sat the next oldest brother, Austin. He, like Nick, had inherited their father's size and was at least two inches taller than Joe. Opposite the table from Nick sat Billy, the youngest, but smartest boy of the family.

"Which one of you did it?" Joe asked.

"Which of us did what?" Nick replied.

"Which of you stole the ring?" Joe was beginning to get angry now.

"What ring? Austin replied.

"The engagement ring. The one I got for Maria. One of you followed me out into the corn maze, hit me with something, and then made off with the ring I had been holding. You all have feelings for her, but she picked me. So tell me which one of you did it?"

"Well it wasn't me." Austin said. "I haven't left the house all day."

"And it wasn't me." Billy said. "I was helping Austin with lunch in here, until I went to go find you, and then I got lost in the corn maze."

"It wasn't me, either." Nick said. "I was outside, but I was over by the barn working on the tractor."

Joe eyed them all, certain he now he knew who'd taken the ring.

Solution:

"Billy!" Joe said. "Give it back."

"What do you mean give it back?"

"You're the only one who could have taken the ring. The footprints of the person who attacked me weren't as deep as mine, or as long as mine. That means someone shorter and lighter left those tracks. Nick and Austin could not have done it!"

"I don't know what you're talking about?"

"I don't know what you're talking about! You say you got lost in the maze? We grew up here. We all know the corn maze too well to get lost. Plus, it was easy for you to follow my muddy prints to find me."

"Well ..."

"Well nothing, Billy! Give me back the ring!"